

PALILA

(*Loxioides bailleui*)

When the Palila's whistle-like call echoed repeatedly through the forest, the Hawaiians believed it to be a sign of impending rain. Today this distinctive call is heard only in the restricted range Palila now inhabit on Mauna Kea.

DISTRIBUTION: Palila range from 6,500 to 9,600 feet in mamane-naio forests on the slopes of Mauna Kea on the island of Hawai'i. Their distribution shifts according to food availability, being most dense in areas where fully developed green seed pods of mamane are available.

DESCRIPTION: Palila have a golden yellow head and breast which contrasts with a gray back, whitish abdomen, and black lores. The dark bill is thick and stubby and is orange colored in juvenile birds. Length is 6-6.5 inches. Females and immatures are not as brightly colored as males.

VOICE: A distinctive two-syllable up-slurred call note is uttered back and forth among feeding birds. The melodious song is quiet, different from the louder advertisement song given in morning and evening.

NESTING: Breeding season begins in March and continues through August. The female constructs a nest of grasses, stems, roots, and bark in the branches of mamane trees. Two eggs are usually laid in the lichen and leaf-lined bowl of the nest. Both parents regurgitate food to feed their young who remain in the nest for up to 31 days before fledging.

DIET: Palila depend on the green seed pods of mamane trees as a primary source of food. They feed on these bitter seeds by securing the pod with one foot while extracting the seeds with their thick bill. The young leaves, buds, and flowers of mamane also provide food, as do insects and the berries of naio.

CONSERVATION NOTE: Palila now inhabit less than 10 percent of their historical range. During the 1890s and early 1900s Palila could be found in the North and South Kona districts and in a much wider area on Mauna Kea.

The reasons for their decline are not fully understood. Predation, competition, disease, and fire may all have contributed to their decline. A major factor has been deterioration of habitat due to grazing of feral animals. Palila habitat has been drastically altered since grazing feral sheep, goats and pigs became established on Mauna Kea. By 1940 the rapidly growing population of feral sheep had reached 40,000, or roughly one animal for every two acres.

In an effort to restore Palila habitat, most of the feral goats and sheep were removed from Mauna Kea in 1982. This action and continued management of the mamane-naio ecosystem will undoubtedly benefit the Palila and other native birds, such as the 'Akiapola'au, who share this woodland habitat



A Palila perches in a mamane tree, its main source of food and shelter.

— Photo by Tim A. Buft